

VZCZCXRO2154
OO RUEHAG
DE RUEHFR #3876/01 1591314
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 081314Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8284
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 003876

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE, S/CT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/07/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [FR](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: PRO-SEPARATIST CORSICAN LAWYER SAYS MOVEMENT IS
SPLINTERED, DYING

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR BRUCE TURNER, FOR REASONS 1.4
B/D

¶1. (C) Summary: Prominent Corsican lawyer Pascal Garbarini, who represents the majority of Corsicans imprisoned on terrorism-related charges, told poloff that the long-running separatist movement is ideologically impoverished, splintered into competing factions, evolving towards common criminality (but not, he claimed, towards xenophobia), and largely spent as a motivating force for Corsicans. Although this harsh view could be due to the disillusionment of a former true believer, it is nonetheless striking given Corsica's outsize reputation among continental French, many of whom refuse to visit this island of approximately 250,000 inhabitants because they fear they will be targeted. Clearly, though, Corsican separatism does not occupy the attention of French policymakers the way it did in the 1980s and 1990s. End summary.

¶2. (C) Poloff met with Garbarini in Corsica on June 1, near Ajaccio, the largest city. Garbarini said he became involved in the Corsican separatist movement in the 1990s as a "lawyer-sympathizer" and is currently the defense lawyer for over 70 Corsicans jailed for terrorism-related crimes. His most infamous client is Yvan Colonna, who in 1998 assassinated Claude Erignac, the prefect of Corsica, and evaded captivity for nearly five years before being caught in ¶2003. Garbarini said he is no longer a sympathizer to the cause of Corsican separatism, and does nothing more than fulfill his responsibilities as a defense lawyer. He expressed great frustration at the actions of the separatists, and said they had devolved into banditry and common criminality.

¶3. (C) Garbarini said the separatist movement rose from the anti-colonial ferment of the 1950s and 60s. France considered Corsica to be a colony like Tunisia and Algeria, said Garbarini. As an example, he said that Corsicans fought in World War I as part of the Overseas (Colony) Forces. A common belief that the French government ignored Corsica because it was an "insignificant" colony led to the first stirrings of the separatist movement in the 1970s, said Garbarini. At that time, tankers regularly fouled the beaches and shoreline of Corsica, and the national government was seen by many Corsicans as unwilling to protect their natural resources. (Note: Garbarini refers to the founding of the FLNC separatist movement, started in 1976 in response to the dumping of toxic waste by an Italian multinational near the town of Bastia. End note.) Thirty years later, the FLNC has shattered into many splinter groups, and Garbarini said that the major demands of Corsican separatists - respect and recognition - have been granted. He pointed to the significant level of self-government, the mandatory teaching of the Corsican language in schools, and the strict environmental protections that keep Corsica clean.

14. (C) If separatist demands have largely been met, poloff asked why low-level bombings targeting vacation homes and government offices continue to plague the island. Garbarini offered three explanations: 1) the FLNC splinter groups, often just a handful of uneducated young men, want to show off; 2) wealthy owners of vacation homes sometimes avoid environmental regulations by paying off local mayors, and the bombers are warning them not to do so; and, 3) local conflicts between families are being played out and made to seem as if they are separatist-related. Garbarini noted that many of those active in separatist movements depend heavily on tourism to the island. When asked about the spate of racially-tinged attacks in 2004 and 2005, Garbarini said he suspected they were related to local business disputes. He said Corsicans were not racist, and the island contains well-regarded Portuguese and North African communities. Still, he said Corsicans were "jealous people" and might not look kindly upon perceived successes within the immigrant community.

15. (C) Garbarini bemoaned the fact that the movement has lost its bearings. He expressed great admiration for Catalans in Spain, who he said had more autonomy and "self-respect" than Corsicans. Current separatists are involved more in criminal acts than ideology, he said. The overwhelming majority of Corsicans do not want any more autonomy from the "continent," said an annoyed Garbarini, despite the fact that France is the most centralized state in Europe. He concluded that the Corsican separatism was ideologically spent, and no longer enjoyed any significant support.

16. (C) Comment: Although Garbarini engaged in a hefty level of spin (he said the Corsican separatists he represented were guilty only of "armed propaganda," not terrorism), his basic

PARIS 00003876 002 OF 002

message that Corsican separatism has waned since the 1980s and 90s is corroborated by terrorism investigating judges in Paris. Still, low-level bombings continue on a regular basis. Even though injuries due to these attacks are extremely rare, they nonetheless cement the impression among "continental" French that Corsica is an island rife with separatist tension. Anecdotal evidence - off-hand comments in the press, and among contacts - reveal that many French believe they will be targeted if they visit Corsica. When asked where he saw Corsica in 20 or 30 years, Garbarini shrugged his shoulders and said, "the same." He said the periodic bombings were now part of the culture, a coming of age of sorts for disaffected youth. "Corsica is special," he concluded. In a culture that fervently believes in its exceptionalism, Corsica has carved out a niche of its own. End comment.

Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

STAPLETON